

**Bachelor of Integrated Studies (BIS)  
5-Year Program Review Site Visit  
Dean's Response  
Academic Year: 2016-17**

Submitted by:  
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**Introduction**

The Bachelor of Integrated Studies (BIS) director and staff prepared a thoughtful self-study, Program Review Evaluation Team site visit, and response to the Evaluation Team site visit report. It is clear that the BIS team has been responsive to the recommendations listed in the previous program review of 2011-2012 and therefore is well positioned to be as responsive to the recommendations in the 2017-2018 program review process. The BIS team should be commended for addressing each of the recommendations offered by the site visit team in 2012 and the improvements to the BIS program because of that responsiveness.

The Program Review Evaluation Team provided a thoughtful and careful review of the BIS program that was overwhelmingly positive. The team gave several commendations recognizing the strengths of the program and several recommendations to continue to strengthen the BIS program. The BIS program responded with an equally thoughtful report addressing each recommendation by identifying action steps over the next three years. Both commendations and recommendations made by the site review team and the BIS program's response to them are addressed below.

**Site Visit Team Commendations**

The Site Visit Review Team's commendations of the BIS program are consistent with my own observations of the BIS program. It is a program that is supporting WSU's mission and core themes of access, learning and community. The attention and support provided to special populations of students in particular have become a hallmark of the program. The program enjoys amicable relationships with many individuals and programs across campus, due in large part to the strong relationship building skills of the current director, Mike Cena and his very capable staff, Beth Thompson and Marie Clayton. Additionally, the collaboration between BIS and the other high-impact programs on campus has been very positive and continues to grow under the leadership of Mike Cena. Furthermore, the Site Visit Team noted the positive feedback students gave about their experiences in the BIS program and how user friendly the website is for advise and support. These commendations are well deserved.

**Site Visit Team Recommendations and Program Response**

Marketing/Branding – The Site Visit Team recommended stronger branding and marketing for the BIS program given most of recruitment to the program occurs by word of mouth. The program's response to the recommendation is to begin developing a new brand for the BIS

degree that emphasizes the high ratio of faculty to a single student – “Three Professors for One Student.” I applaud the rebranding effort and encourage the BIS team to reach out to WSU’s Marketing and Communication office to get help with this re-branding campaign. It is imperative we keep messages consistent with the overall university mission and vision and the professionals in this office are equipped to assist with exactly these types of changes.

Information – The Site Visit Team recommended disseminating information about BIS through more channels than are currently being utilized. The program’s response is to explore the possible channels with the BIS advisory board. This is an appropriate response and I encourage the BIS team and advisory board to consider reaching out to advisors to help them better understand BIS and what it has to offer students. Secondly, I would encourage reaching out to deans to request an opportunity to present an overview of BIS at one of their department chairs meetings. A starting point for this recommendation would involve the BIS director attending Deans Council to provide the overview of BIS that he would like to present at their chairs meeting. The deans could provide feedback on the presentation, the BIS director tweaks the presentation based on the feedback and then sets up appointments to attend each college deans’ chairs meeting during the fall 2017 semester.

Mentoring – The Site Visit Team recommended the BIS program take steps to professionalize the faculty-student mentoring experience, which is a good recommendation that could possibly increase the level of satisfaction of both faculty and students involved in BIS. The program response focuses on developing a Canvas-based class for faculty mentors, which is appropriate but only one potential method for improving faculty mentorship of students. I would encourage the BIS program to broaden the possible pathways to mentoring beyond a Canvas-based class only. I would like to see the advisory board explore the many ways we could possibly provide better mentoring to BIS faculty. For example, I would encourage BIS to collaborate with the Teaching & Learning Forum (TLF) to develop a Community of Practice (COP) for BIS faculty mentors that helps them learn best practices from each other. The COP could be called “Mentoring BIS Students.” Mike Cena, as BIS director, or a faculty member serving on the BIS Advisory Board could serve as the convener of the COP periodically throughout the academic year. This COP structure is supported by TLF with a \$500 budget for each COP to purchase books, food, or other resources that support them in their exploration of best practices for mentoring BIS students.

BIS 4800 Structures – The Site Visit Team recommended adding more structure to the BIS 4800 course to help guide students through the capstone project. It is clear from the program response that this recommendation is of highest priority because it will have the most immediate impact on student success within the BIS program. This kind of benchmarking is important for providing the students with the explicit guidance, support and expectations they need to plan and complete a BIS capstone within a reasonable timeframe. I commend the BIS program team for having already identified the appropriate benchmarks and implementing them so quickly in the program (slated for summer 2017). Feedback from students regarding the benchmarks and data on the amount of time it takes students to complete a BIS capstone with the new benchmarks will be important for helping assess the impact of these changes on student progress and successful completion of the BIS program.

Compensation – The Site Visit Team noted that faculty members are minimally compensated for their participation as BIS capstone mentors and recommend higher compensation. As pointed out in the BIS director’s response to the recommendation, this is not a new recommendation and the WSU administration is well aware of this concern. This compensation question, however, involves a larger conversation at WSU given faculty are participating in various high-impact programs outside of their academic homes and not receiving compensation for doing so. For example, faculty who mentor students in undergraduate research or community-engaged learning projects outside of their regular teaching requirements are not receiving additional compensation for these activities. If compensation for faculty involvement in these types of activities changes at WSU, we can expect compensation for BIS faculty involvement to change accordingly.

Discipline Methods – The Site Visit Team recommended “Departments offering BIS emphases may find it helpful to have an introduction to the discipline, methodology, and integrated studies philosophy at the beginning of BIS programs of study.” The interpretation of this recommendation by the program, given the program response, is that the BIS program needs to continue to work with academic departments to help them embed an introductory and methodology course specific to the discipline into their BIS emphasis. My interpretation of the recommendation suggests an introduction to the discipline and the methods in that discipline is recommended along with a course on integrated studies philosophy. If my interpretation of the recommendation is correct, the program response only addresses the academic department’s responsibility to provide the introduction to and methods of their discipline. The program response does not address the recommendation for a course on integrated studies philosophy. In order to address the latter part of the recommendation, I would encourage the BIS advisory board to revisit a previous discussion about the use of BIS 2800 as an introduction to BIS and integrated studies philosophy.

### **Recommendation not Included in the Site Visit Team Review**

Assessment of Retention and Graduation – The BIS program works diligently to assess program level outcomes of students’ performance in the program and should be commended for such efforts. Additionally, I recommend the program begin systematically collecting data on students in the program and correlating their participation in the program with university-level outcomes related to retention and graduation. I recommend working closely with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to develop dashboards displaying demographic characteristics, fall to fall retention, time to graduation and 4-year, 6-year, and 8-year graduation rates of BIS students over time. The BIS program employs a number of high-impact practices and it would be useful to demonstrate the effectiveness of those practices in contributing to student success.

### **Conclusion**

The Site Visit Review Team’s recognition of the uniqueness of the BIS program and the assets it brings to Weber State University and our students is spot on. The commendations and recommendations made by the Site Visit Review Team are solid and the program’s response to these is appropriate. I encourage the BIS program to use the additional

recommendations provided in this report as guidance and direction for continuing to strengthen the BIS experience for students and faculty.